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**FINANCE PANEL APPROVES SIGNIFICANT PLANS TO BOOST
FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION, FIGHT ELDER ABUSE,
EXPLOITATION, AND IMPROVE PATIENT SAFETY**

Three proposals approved for full Senate consideration

Washington, DC – The Senate Finance Committee approved by voice vote today the Chairman’s Mark to the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act, the Patient Safety and Abuse Prevention Act, and the Elder Justice Act. Included in the Chairman’s Mark to the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act is Baucus’s 2007 Tribal Foster Care and Adoption Access Act, which will give tribes the same direct access to federal foster care dollars that states currently enjoy. Baucus said the bills will make significant improvements to the adoption and foster care systems, and will institute vital protections to prevent abuse and neglect of long term care patients and senior citizens.

“The improvements to adoption and foster care policy we made in the Finance Committee today are some of the most important this panel has made in the last ten years,” said Baucus. **“I’ve long fought to give Indian tribes equal access to the adoption and foster care dollars they desperately need. I’m proud that more Indian children can now receive foster care in their own communities and their own cultures. This package also delivers desperately needed resources to adoptive and foster families, and provides important opportunities for older children as they age out of foster care.”**

“The Finance panel also stood up for America’s seniors today when it approved the Chairman’s marks to the Patient Safety and Abuse Prevention Act, and the Elder Justice Act,” Baucus continued. **“Caregivers and communities are now one step closer to securing the training and education programs that are so important in preventing financial exploitation and mistreatment of seniors. And families of long-term care patients are one step closer to the confidence they deserve that their relatives are in safe and capable hands. I look forward to continuing work to see these good policies become law.”**

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In addition to the provisions of Baucus's Tribal Foster Care and Adoption Access Act, the Chairman's Mark of the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act also extends and increases financial incentives for families who adopt children, and provides particular support for adoption of children with special needs. The mark provides resources that make it easier for immediate relatives to foster children in need of care. The Chairman's mark would support these relative caregivers through funding for grants that permit flexibility in licensing standards and that connect relatives to the services they need to care for kids and – for the first time – would direct federal assistance to family members, generally grandparents or aunts and uncles, who have been awarded guardianship rights known as relative guardianship. The Chairman's Mark would also significantly increase resources available to children aging out of the foster care system to successfully transition into adult life. A summary of the Chairman's Mark of the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act can be found on the following pages.

The Chairman's Mark of the Elder Justice Act significantly strengthens prevention, detection, monitoring, and intervention of elder mistreatment, abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. The Elder Justice Act will direct federal resources toward projects that will assist families, communities, and states in fighting elder abuse, through programs like training to identify and combat abuse and the creation of a resources database on education and prevention efforts. It will tighten requirements for long-term care facilities to report abuse, and provide additional informational resources for families looking for long-term care options. The proposal will also do more to assist long-term care workers, including bolstering recruitment and supporting continued training. In the 110th Congress, the Elder Justice Act was originally introduced by Senators Blanche Lincoln (D – Ark.) and Orrin Hatch (R – Utah).

The Chairman's Mark of the Patient Safety and Abuse Prevention Act expands a successful seven-state pilot program that was part of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA). The Chairman's Mark would build on the current program's record of success by making money available to states nationwide to improve their existing background check infrastructure for employees with direct access to frail elders and individuals with disabilities in long-term care facilities and other settings. These efforts would significantly improve the ability of states to design cost-effective and efficient background check systems that would reduce the risk of elder abuse in the thousands of facilities and other settings where many of the most frail Americans receive health and long-term care. The Patient Safety and Abuse Prevention Act was originally introduced by Senator Herb Kohl (D- Wis.).

The Finance Committee has jurisdiction over the Medicare program, grants to States for aid and services to families in need, child welfare services, and adoption assistance. A summary of the Chairman's Mark of the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act follows here

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Summary of the Chairman's Mark of the Improved Adoption Incentives and Relative Guardianship Support Act

- **Extending and Improving Adoption Incentives:** the bill would reauthorize through 2012 the Adoption Incentives Program, which gives states financial incentives for increasing the number of children who are adopted out of foster care. And, the bill would expand that program to encourage states to improve statistics on successful adoptions by also offering incentives for states when they successfully increase the *rate* of foster child adoptions. The legislation would also significantly boost Federal adoption assistance dollars specifically for adoption of children with special needs.
- **Increasing Tribal Foster Care and Adoption Access:** The legislation would allow Tribes to serve the children in their communities directly with culturally appropriate care and understanding by providing Indian Tribes with the same direct access to federal funding for foster care and adoption services that states currently receive. The bill would allow Native American tribes to claim direct Federal funding for foster care, adoption assistance, and relative guardianship, putting tribal access to federal resources on par with states' access. It would also create grants for states that successfully collaborate with tribes to improve permanency outcomes for Indian children. The legislation would also establish a National Child Welfare Resource Center for Tribes.
- **Keeping More Kids with Relative Guardians:** This bill would help more children to stay in the care of a family member by awarding Federal dollars to states when they move children from foster care to the care of a family member, generally grandparents or aunts and uncles, who have been awarded guardianship rights known as relative guardianship. Federal assistance to relative guardians is not available under current law, but could give families the resources needed to take 15,000 children out of the foster care system for good. The legislation would also provide support to relatives who many times can not meet a state's requirement for licensing for foster care. Because standards that may be inappropriate in a stranger's foster care home may be perfectly fine in a relative's home, such as a situation where two cousins share a bedroom, the proposal establishes a limited demonstration program to determine whether or not relaxing some of these licensing requirements would increase permanency outcomes for children.

- **Supporting Older Children in Foster Care:** The legislation would help foster children aging out of the system successfully transition into adult life by providing resources for them to pursue career interests after they turn 18. The bill would allow states to continue to claim Federal reimbursement for foster care, adoption assistance, and relative guardianship support for all children who are over 18 years old as they age out of the system. The bill would also require states to work with these children to create a transition plan that includes specific options on housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentoring, continuing support services, work force supports, and employment services. The bill would also authorize direct access to Federal Parent Locator Services for State child welfare agencies.
- **Helping Caregivers Reach support and resources** - Nationwide, more than six million children – that is, one in 12 children – are being raised by grandparents or other relatives often called kinship caregivers. The Baucus proposal would establish a competitive grant program to help the grandparents and other relatives get accurate information about and access to the full range of supports available to them.

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